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USAID/DCHA JBRAUSE
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APIYAKA DCHA/FFP JBORNS; JDWORKEN; SANTHONY; CMUTAMBA;
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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA and USAID/FFP Marsabit, Isiolo, and
Laikipia Districts Drought Assessment

REF: A) NAIROBI 2133
B) NAIROBI 2067

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) From October 5 to 10, USAID's Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) staff visited Laikipia District, Rift Valley Province, and Isiolo and Marsabit districts, Eastern Province, to assess reports of food insecurity associated with poor performance of the 2009 long rains. According to local Government of Kenya (GoK) officials and district steering groups (DSGs), humanitarian conditions in the three districts are currently worse than during the 2000-2004 drought due to consecutive seasons of below-average rains and limited crop and livestock recovery. While observing relatively stable health conditions in the three districts, USAID/OFDA staff noted concerns regarding deteriorating livestock conditions and adoption of negative coping mechanisms among the population. In addition, USAID/FFP staff noted concerns regarding the capacity of UN World Food Program (WFP) implementing agency the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) to effectively conduct general food distributions (GFDs) in Marsabit District. USAID/FFP fully supports WFP plans to conduct an independent review of implementing partners to institute a more objective partner selection process in the future. End summary.

IMPACT OF THE 2009 LONG RAINS

¶2. (U) According to the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG), the March to June portion of the 2009 long rains performed poorly in most areas of the country, with four of the eight provinces experiencing less than 40 percent of average rainfall for the season. As a result of poor rains, KFSSG reports near-total crop failure and significant declines in livestock health in affected areas, negatively impacting the livelihoods of both pastoral and agricultural populations.

¶3. (U) Pastoralists constitute approximately 90 percent of the population in Laikipia, Isiolo, and Marsabit districts, with households engaged in agriculture representing the remaining 10 percent of the population. In northern pastoral areas, populations remain highly vulnerable to food insecurity, as successive seasons of insufficient rainfall have depleted resource bases and undermined traditional coping mechanisms. As a result of increased food insecurity, USAID/OFDA staff noted reports of populations engaged in negative coping mechanisms, including charcoal collection, pastoral to urban migration, and decreased meal consumption. Ongoing drought has also continued to contribute to increased inter-ethnic and resource-based conflict, particularly in Isiolo District, as well as migration to wildlife conservation lands (Ref A). Despite observing several signs of distressed coping mechanisms, USAID/OFDA staff note that the ongoing GoK and WFP school feeding

program has mitigated significant school dropout rates, with the districts visited reporting an overall increase in school enrollment in recent months.

¶4. (U) In Isiolo District, local GoK officials report that successive crop failure and poor long rains have resulted in a significantly below average harvest, threatening food security among agricultural populations. According to the Isiolo District agriculture officer, the majority of irrigated land in the district remains empty, as the Uasin Gishu River currently lacks water. However, USAID/OFDA staff observed limited cropping under drip irrigation and ongoing preparations for planting during the October to December short rains.

DETERIORATING LIVESTOCK CONDITIONS

¶5. (U) Ongoing drought conditions and limited water and pasture availability have resulted in increased livestock deaths and disease and extended livestock migration patterns in most pastoral areas. According to GoK officials, between 40 and 70 percent of livestock in Laikipia, Isiolo, and Marsabit districts have died due to lack of pasture and associated nutritional deficiencies, as well as disease. As herd sizes diminish, relief agencies note reports of increasing cattle theft to replenish depleted livestock, particularly in Isiolo and Samburu districts (Ref A). According to FEWS NET, cattle raids in the two districts during September killed an estimated 10 pastoralists and led to the seizure of more than 1,000 livestock.

¶6. (U) Drought-affected pastoralists have moved the majority of remaining cattle long distances in search of water and pasture, resulting in declining livestock health and increased resource-related competition. According to FEWS NET, deteriorating livestock body conditions associated with increased trekking distances have negatively affected the purchasing power of pastoralists. In October, FEWS NET reported cattle and goat prices approximately 40 percent below average in

pastoralist areas, with cereal prices remaining more than 100 percent above average. In response, the GoK is operating a small-scale destocking program to buy cattle at above-market prices and distribute meat to the local population. The GoK has also provided immunizations, medications, and fodder in affected districts.

HEALTH AND WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

17. (U) Successive seasons of poor rains have resulted in significant water shortages in drought-affected areas of Kenya. In Isiolo and Laikipia districts, the GoK reports that the majority of boreholes, dams, and wells have dried up, necessitating GoK water tankering and rationing activities. In the North Horr area of Marsabit District, USAID/OFDA observed sufficient water availability due in part to ongoing USAID/OFDA-funded partner Food for the Hungry (FH) initiatives. However,

USAID/OFDA and USAID/FFP staff noted limited pasture availability in area due to significant livestock migration from drought-affected areas to North Horr in search of water. FH food-for-work activities in North Horr work to mitigate the impact of reduced rains through the construction of water canals.

18. (U) Poor access to water and limited sanitation facilities have also contributed to increased incidence of waterborne diseases in drought-affected areas. Despite reports of increased cholera and acute watery diarrhea (AWD) cases in Isiolo District in recent months, district health officials note that the number of cases remains within seasonal averages. As of mid-October, health facilities in the district maintained an overall low volume of activity, with no reported active cholera or AWD cases. However, health personnel noted limited staff availability to respond to potential disease outbreaks. As the current rainy season progresses, relief agencies have expressed concerns regarding increased incidence of waterborne diseases associated with heavy rainfall.

NUTRITION

19. (U) Recent nutritional surveys indicate critical nutrition conditions throughout Kenya, including in areas not previously experiencing significant global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates. Preliminary results from a World Vision nutrition survey conducted between May and June in southern Marsabit District revealed GAM rates of between 20 and 30 percent among children, significantly above the emergency threshold of 15 percent. In the districts visited, however, USAID/OFDA staff noted an effective malnutrition response, with adequate supplemental and therapeutic feeding supplies available and ongoing outreach and supplemental feeding activities occurring in even the most remote areas. Based on observations and random measurement of children, USAID/OFDA staff noted that the population in the districts appeared relatively healthy, most likely due to ongoing nutrition interventions.

Food Assistance

10. (U) In Laikipia, Isiolo, and Marsabit districts, USAID/FFP partner WFP conducts GFDs through lead agencies Caritas Nyeri, ActionAid, and KRCS, respectively. WFP-supported GFDs target approximately 68,000 people--or 16 percent of the population--in Laikipia District, 43,000 individuals--or 34 percent of the population--in Isiolo District, and 80,000 others--

or 60 percent of the population--in Marsabit District, with increases in beneficiary caseloads expected during October distributions. Households in the districts consistently report sharing rations, particularly among pastoralist populations, due to deteriorating food security among the population.

¶11. (SBU) Upholding previous concerns (Ref B), WFP notes that KRCS has demonstrated poor capacity in implementing GFDs in Marsabit District. For instance,

WFP staff recently noted that KRCS had employed only one food monitor for 12 simultaneous food distributions, with no means of transport. Reports have also indicated that food transport contracts have benefited politically-connected individuals, as well as particular ethnic groups. While the situation in Marsabit has improved recently compared to early 2009, KRCS/Nairobi still appears to be providing relatively little support to the field.

¶12. (SBU) However, WFP reports no effective way to immediately rectify the situation, as DSGs currently select lead agencies for WFP distributions and have demonstrated substantial support for KRCS. Observers note that KRCS exerted significant effort to be selected as the lead agency for GFDs throughout the country, including by influencing DSGs and politicians through the provision of incentives, such as hiring recommended staff and providing services in particular areas. (Note: Serving as a lead agency for a WFP GFD, particularly in Marsabit--geographically Kenya's second largest district--provides organizations, such as KRCS, with a significant amount of WFP financial support, including food transport costs and funding for vehicles and field staff. End Note.)

¶13. (SBU) Given the consistent allegations against KRCS countrywide and confirmed poor implementation capacity in the field, WFP plans to conduct an independent performance review of partners by December, including financial management, with a view toward instituting a more objective partner selection process starting in April. USAID/FFP fully supports this process and will review the draft terms of reference in the coming days.

CONCLUSION

¶14. (U) Although relief agencies expect enhanced October to December short rains to replenish water and pasture in drought-affected areas, current shortages continue to result in deteriorating food security conditions among both pastoral and agricultural populations in Laikipia, Isiolo, and Marsabit districts. As the short rains progress, FEWS NET projects slight improvements in food security in drought-affected areas, following an initial upsurge in livestock mortality. However, relief agencies caution that livelihood recovery may take several years due to the significant rates of animal death and resource depletion during the recent drought. To mitigate the effects of future dry seasons, USAID/OFDA notes a need for enhanced water catchment and storage in drought-affected areas, as well as continued efforts to strengthen livelihoods. USAID/OFDA and USAID/FFP staff will continue to closely monitor conditions in drought-affected areas and determine appropriate interventions as the situation evolves.

¶15. (U) In Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, USAID/OFDA provided more than USD 24 million in funding to support nutrition, economic recovery and market systems, health, agriculture and food security, and water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions, as well as local

food procurement and distribution in Kenya. Of the total, USAID/OFDA provided USD 15 million to implementing partner FH to strengthen livelihood opportunities, protect and diversify household assets, and increase agricultural productivity among more than 663,000 vulnerable pastoralists throughout northern and eastern areas of Kenya, including Marsabit District. In FY 2009 and to date in FY 2010, USAID/FFP has provided approximately 180,040 metric tons of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food assistance, valued at nearly USD 184 million, through WFP for drought-affected and refugee populations in Kenya.

RANNEBERGER